

[The Swedes]

Duplicate of 19804

THE SWEDES

Mens sana in corpore sano With a flower in the working man's buttonhole.

Fifty years ago, at a time when Swedish labor was rapidly imported, not more than five wayworn voyagers had arrived in Barre, bringing little else with them than their sturdy character and high principles. These skilled granite workers were destined to exert a strong influence for good on the future of the granite district. Their numbers grow gradually until the world war period, reaching one hundred and fifty adults, and withdrew until at present, dropping to seventy-one born in Sweden.

Joining hands with the workers of other countries, they, by their industry, integrity, and ability established high standards and accomplishments, being owners and managers of polishing plants. One of the larger mills doing custom polishing was owned by Aaron Johnson. Later, the Svea Granite Company succeeded under the ownership of Andrew and Charles Knutson and John Isaackson. Cutting plants were owned by Isaac and August Peterson and Carl Johnson. In the Carswell-Wetmore Company, two Swedes held partnership, Carl Erickson and Waldus Bengtson.

Among the Swedish firms others may be listed: Hedberg & Gustafson, Martinson Estate, Nelson & Mattson, and Olson & Nelson. Glysson Company for years had a Swede as partner, O. E. Anderson. When the Scandia Granite Company was bought by Arthur Anderson and Anthony Friberg, the name was changed to Anderson & Friberg. Aside from the latter, there are Johnson & Gustafson, Anderson & Johnson, and the Steele Granite Company owned by Alfred Wilhelmsen, Axel Erickson and Oscar Johansson.

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The Swedes have done their share in promoting better relations between bosses and underdogs and are ready to progress even further whenever the opportunity arises. In the Granite Cutter's Union, Helge Carlson is President and Evert Nylen, Treasurer, also Carlson is one of the Vice-Presidents of the Vermont State Federation of Labor and Nylen, Secretary of the Central Labor Union, The Vice-Presidency in the Polishers' Union is held by Jack Isaackson and in the Lumpers', Boxers', and Derrickmen's Union by Carl Osterberg.

Any account of the town naturally expresses only pride in the contribution of the Swedish race to the culture and progress of the Barre democracy. In politics the citizen of Swedish descent is likely to be a progressive, and one who feels a high responsibility for the community. John Martinson held the office of Alderman. None of the Swedes have a police card. They are not only law-abiding, but thrifty. Light now twenty-seven of the thirty-seven families own their homes.

Most of the Swedes are Lutherans and on occasion their numbers send for a priest to baptize their children. The Baptist Conference supported a mission here, sending six pastors, but these services were discontinued some years ago. ³ Since then the group worship independently in the protestant American Churches.

The Swedish families have organized themselves in three sick benefit lodges: the Monitor Lodge, 1913-1938; the Swedish Brotherhood of America, Granite City Lodge, No. 153, 1913- (yet no meeting for three years); and the Order of Vasa, North Star Lodge, No. 112, 1907- . Always at the Christmas season the North Star Lodge holds a social for the children. A local branch of the Scandinavian Educational Society (a Socialist organization) was founded in 1917. Its main purpose was to educate the Swedes in the problems facing the working class. Membership meetings were held weekly, and public meetings bi-monthly. In the most active period of discussions, to which the public were invited, outside speakers took part. Most of the members left the granite district permanently during the

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strike of 1922; so the society was discontinued that year. No immigrants are coming here, and so far, the second generation has shown little interest in these local lodges.

Certain Swedish customs have been preserved by the ninety adult residents here. Christmas and Easter are celebrated two days: Christmas Eve supper and Easter Day breakfast are special occasions. Beginning the supper at the smorgasbord (table of cold meats, anchovies, pickled herring, head cheese, milk cheeses, meat balls, and hard and soft breads), the imported longa (fish specially treated) is the main course; then the rice porridge served in a bowl from which everybody serves oneself to one's own plate. The reason everyone takes part in the pretty custom of dipping in the great bowl is to try to get hold of the one nut. Whoever succeeds in getting the nut will first be married.

Three hundred and sixty-four days in the year a Swede may like his eggs soft, but Easter Day for breakfast it is the custom to eat eggs hard-boiled. While still warm the eggs are chopped with cream and butter added. The idea back of the dish is to prepare and partake of one's fill: the ever-abundance of Thanksgiving.

In Barre the good qualities of these skilled granite workers has been appreciated; they are "good neighbors." They take part in the assemblies which are most effective in bringing people of different nationalities together: unions, sports, churches, order. They set a rare pattern of brotherhood.

What William Penn said of the Swedes whom he found on the Delaware is true of the local Swedish population. "And I must do them right - I see few young men more sober and laborious."